

# Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

(Line item 0321-1600)

## SUPPORT BALSER AMENDMENT TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR MLAC TO \$15.5 MILLION

→ The House Ways & Means budget released today provides \$11 million in funding for civil legal aid in the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation line item (#0321-1600), a cut of \$1 million from the FY13 appropriation.

→ Plummeting interest rates combined with the housing market crash have resulted in a devastating 78% decline in MLAC's income from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program. As a result, MLAC has already been forced to cut grants to the legal aid programs it funds by approximately 54% since FY08.

→ Help avoid further cuts by supporting Rep. Balser's amendment which would increase the MLAC appropriation to \$15.5 million.

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The work of MLAC-funded legal aid programs substantially boosts the Commonwealth's economy. The shortage of legal aid resources, however, is undercutting this benefit.

- New revenue and cost savings from civil legal aid in FY12 were estimated at \$48 million, including \$28 million in new federal revenues.
- Programs have lost 36% of their attorney staff in the last five years because of program cutbacks and have also cut salaries, imposed furloughs, closed offices and reduced intake hours.
- Fewer legal aid lawyers results in fewer services for clients and fewer federal funds for our state. New revenue and cost savings to the Commonwealth from civil legal aid were estimated at \$78 million in FY10. Due in part to decreased funding, that amount fell to \$53 million in FY11 and \$48 million in FY12.

Client service is being compromised.

- At the same time that local legal aid programs are cutting staff, the number of individuals and families eligible for civil legal aid has continued to grow with close to 1 million people in Massachusetts now living on incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level, or \$566 per week for a family of four.
- Civil legal aid eases the strain of *pro se* litigants, unrepresented people in the courts, on the already overburdened court system. Restoring some of the ability of legal aid programs to represent clients will also decrease the number of *pro se* litigants.
- Legal aid attorneys also train and supervise many private bar volunteers representing low-income litigants. In their absence, the number of these *pro bono* volunteers diminishes substantially.

For more information, contact Elaine O'Reilly at 617-523-7808 x124, Mary Ann Walsh at 617-447-3711, or Lonnie Powers at 617-367-1414

About MLAC: The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation was established by the state legislature 30 years ago to ensure that low-income people with critical, non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation. For more information, visit [www.mlac.org](http://www.mlac.org).